



MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 30, 2025
TO: Kitsap County Commissioners
FROM: Long-Range Planning Staff
RE: Staff Initial Summary Report and Recommendations

Staff has completed an initial summary report for all rural reclassification requests and will present preliminary findings. These findings are intended to help support the Board in making decisions as to whether applications should continue to move forward through the full zone reclassification adoption process. This memorandum provides a high-level summary of this report and staff's recommendation in preparation for the June 9, 2025 work study.

Background:

When the "Year of the Rural" project began, the County communicated its plan to complete an initial review of applications no later than June. There were 17 applications in total, all of which had been deferred from the Comprehensive Plan Update in 2024. The initial review is important to provide transparency to decisionmakers and to applicants about preliminary findings well before a more time-consuming final adoption process at year's end.

Initial Review Criteria:

For the purposes of this initial review, all applications were reviewed against the general criteria in KCC 21.08.070(A) that are applicable to all types of requests. These are:

1. *How circumstances related to the proposed amendment and/or the area in which the property affected by the proposed amendment is located have substantially changed since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan or applicable development regulations;*
2. *How the assumptions upon which the Comprehensive Plan is based are no longer valid, or there is new information available which was not considered during the adoption of, or during the last annual amendment to, the Comprehensive Plan or development regulations; and*

3. *How the requested redesignation is in the public interest and the proposal is consistent with the Kitsap County Comprehensive Plan.*

Staff Recommendation:

In staff's opinion, all residential requests demonstrated inconsistency with most or all the initial three review criteria. The primary rationale for this was the cumulative effects of growth in the rural area, which conflicts with the assumptions as well as the Goals, Policies, and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, Countywide Planning Policies, and Multi-County Planning Policies. Accordingly, if it is determined these criteria cannot be met, staff's recommendation is to not proceed with any of the residential reclassification requests.

Staff does recommend continuing review of the three non-residential reclassification requests, as more analysis is needed to make a recommendation. A final decision would come at the end of the year.

Rural Growth:

The main concern noted in the initial review is additional rural development capacity and consistency with the adopted Comprehensive Plan. The County's rural growth target is 4,391 additional people through 2044, however, there is already existing capacity beyond this number. In staff's opinion, goals and policies of the Comp Plan (and by reference Countywide Policies and Multi-County policies), do not support additional rural growth.

According to the 2021 Buildable Lands Report, the County is also not currently meeting its rural/urban split goal as established in Countywide Planning Policies of no more than 24% of growth going to rural areas. When this goal is met, it automatically reverts to no more than 17%. One individual change may not substantially alter rural growth rates, but the cumulative effect is required to be considered, especially if it (or several approvals) signals future upzoning for properties with similar circumstances.

Other Considerations:

It is understood that limiting rural density is a policy decision. In the initial review, staff has provided other considerations:

- Those requests that follow a "regular" zoning boundary and are limited in their impact to rural growth and infrastructure (ex: 1-6 additional units), may not have as great a potential for pressuring surrounding areas to rezone, but may create additional zoning pressures with similar properties elsewhere.

- 11 of the 14 residential requests are related to upzoning RW zoning. Some of these noted that the RW zoning was no longer appropriate, for reasons such as limited viability of forestry, compatibility of forestry with adjacent properties, changing forestry practices, or soil types. Staff has noted these important concerns, but they should be weighed against the potential to further diminish RW zoning in the County or policies around rural growth. Land converted to residential use is unlikely to return to forestry or agricultural use. Given that 43,077 acres of land in Kitsap County are zoned RW, the Board could consider strategies related to future requests from parcels where forestry is becoming a less viable or preferred option.

Considerations from Applications:

Key issues raised by applicants, in their submitted materials, can be summarized as follows:

- Upzones to Rural Residential is still supportive of “rural character.”
- Rural Wooded (RW) zoning is no longer appropriate because commercial forestry is not viable or preferred, due to soils, prevalence of critical areas, changing forest practices, incompatible surrounding uses, or other reasons.
- Desire to subdivide.
- Proximity to a UGA or City, or that rezoning could be compatible with surrounding development patterns when/if a UGA or City expands, or infrastructure improves.

Board Direction:

The Board is the ultimate decision-maker when reviewing and deciding reclassification requests and has the policy discretion to determine compliance with all required criteria, including the three initial criteria above. At this point in the review, however, staff is proceeding under KCC 21.08.050(D) and bringing forth a recommendation as to which of the submitted amendments to continue forward with review. Staff is thus seeking direction as follows:

- If the Board concludes that any additional rural growth/rural density cannot be supported at this time, such a finding would prevent the future approval of all residential reclassification requests. It would then be appropriate to amend the docket at this time to remove residential applications.

- If the Board concludes that rural growth/rural density is not necessarily a limiting factor and that more analysis is needed, then no change to the docket is necessary, OR the board can decide to remove a portion of applications from the docket and direct staff to continue with the review for the remainder of applications.
 - Applications moving forward would be evaluated under the rest of the criteria in KCC 21.08.070(D).

Next Steps:

If continued review is selected, no further action of the Board is necessary.

If the Board chooses to remove requests from further review, the docket should be amended for clarity and transparency. Per the adopted docket Resolution 207-2024, applications that do not meet the general review criteria shall be “automatically removed from the docket because they will prevent the batch consideration of the amendments in a timely matter and shall be administratively closed...” However, staff would recommend adoption a revised resolution.

Attachments:

1. Matrix of staff initial recommendations, including additional factors for Board consideration.
2. Initial Summary report, showing evaluation detail for all requests.